


JOE BURKE, RYAN SOMMERFELDT AND LAURA WANG &
TERRYBERRY PARTNER WEBINAR

How Peer-Recognition Systems Can Increase (or Decrease) Help-Seeking in the Workplace

 August
21, 2024

 1-2pm EST
6-7pm GMT

terryberry
Engage · Reward · Succeed



Connection to Terryberry

- “To Ask, or Not To Ask: The Effects of Broadly and Narrowly Adopted Peer-Recognition Systems on Help Seeking”
 - *Management Science*, forthcoming

- Collaboration with companies



Background

Why Peer-Recognition Programs?

- Peer-recognition systems allow employees to publicly recognize their peers for good work, helping them, etc.
- \$5.9 billion industry (and growing!)

Providers:

terryberry
Engage · Reward · Succeed



kudos.



Achievers



Clients:

amazon



Kellogg's



Zappos.com

LinkedIn



Poll Question

- Does your company have a recognition system that allows peers to recognize one another?
 - Yes
 - No
 - No, but we're considering it





You were recognized for **Responsibility** by **Dorothy Hale**

Just Now

Thank you for the late nights and hard work pulling the H1 roadmap together! I appreciate your approach and explanations. 😊



Comment Like (8)



John Mendez's 5-year work anniversary is today!

5 mins ago

Comment Like (10)



Clarence Wheeler were recognized for **Teamwork** by **Floyd Lindsey**

8 mins ago

Thank you for walking me through the new UI when I had questions 👍
You make yourself available for everyone and it is truly appreciated!

Comment Like (6)



Rosie Wu were recognized for **Transparency** by **Cecilia Phelps**

16 mins ago

Thank you for the quick turnaround creating images for our latest blog post! I dropped this idea on you last-minute ... [See More](#)

Comment Like (8)



Richard Goodman's birthday is today!

2 hour ago

Comment Like (10)

Research Question

Help seeking



<https://youtu.be/rMk3elc0FeY?si=72QaljCnxJ3chVYu>



<https://youtu.be/rMk3elc0FeY?si=72QaljCnxJ3chVYu>

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Research Question

Help seeking



<https://youtu.be/rMk3elc0FeY?si=72QaljCnxJ3chVYu>



Research Question

Why help seeking?

- Many purported benefits of peer-recognition systems
 - Enhanced collaboration, teamwork, corporate learning, productivity, efficiency, employee satisfaction, etc.
- Helping underlies many of these benefits
- Academic research has looked some at *help-giving*



90% of helping interactions begin with help-seeking



Research Question

- Think about the employee groups at your company...
 - Functional groups (e.g., sales department, accounting department, etc.)
 - Specialty groups (e.g., healthcare industry group, education industry group, etc.)
 - Geographic groups (e.g., North division, South division, etc.)
 - Rank groups (e.g., staff, managers, etc.)



Research Question

Level of adoption

- Significant variation in the level of adoption of recognition systems across organizations
 - 66% of recognition systems are not broadly used across the organization

“Our peer-recognition system appears to be geared to provide non-managerial levels of our organization the ability to recognize their peers... It’s used less by those higher up in the hierarchy.”

– Senior Finance Advisor (Fortune 500 Company)

“When we have those [peer-recognition] programs in place I would say what we see more of is managers either recognizing their *teams* a lot [rather than their peers], or not participating as much as their employees might be.”

– Manager from a peer-recognition provider



Research Question

- How do peer-recognition systems affect employees' propensity to seek help, and does the effect depend on the systems' level of adoption?



What Would You Do?

- **Example:** Imagine walking into an elevator in a building that you have never visited. Everyone in the elevator is facing the back of the elevator instead of the door.
- What would you do?
 - A. Face the back of the elevator
 - B. Face the door





<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOOsfkM-nGQ>

Introduction to Social Norms

- **Definition:** Social norms are the unwritten rules of behavior that are considered acceptable in a group or society.
- **Types:**
 - Injunctive Norms: What we think we should do (e.g., don't litter).
 - Descriptive Norms: What we think others actually do (e.g., everyone else recycles).



Harness the Power of Descriptive Norms

- We can harness the power of descriptive norms to motivate employees to engage in behaviors that are consistent with your organization's values.
- Peer recognition system is a great tool:
 - Many positive behaviors go unnoticed if they are not intentionally publicized.
 - Remote work make positive behaviors even more invisible.
 - Peer recognition systems publicize positive behaviors, thus, creating positive norms only for these behaviors.
 - Get your employees to publicize positive behaviors they observe and watch descriptive norms do their magic.



Harness the Power of Descriptive Norms

- Descriptive norms are especially useful when carrots and sticks do not make sense.
- When it comes to encouraging employees to seek help:
 - We can't use carrots because paying people to ask for help will encourage help seeking when help is not needed.
 - We can't punish people for not seeking help because we don't know when they need help.



The Positive

- How does peer recognition affect help seeking?
 - Peer recognition, by publicizing helping interactions within an organization with a focus on help giving, highlights a help-giving descriptive norm.
 - When we create a help-giving norm, other related norms, such as help seeking, are also activated in our brain.
 - Participants in an experiment help others (i.e., conform to a helping norm) more immediately after reading a story that activates an anti-harming norm than after a story that activates an anti-speeding norm.
 - We engage in behaviors that conform to activated norms.



The Negative

- Can peer recognition backfire?
 - I work for Department A, but I only see people in Department B recognizing their peers for helping.
 - I observe a descriptive norm of helping in Department B
 - However, Department B's norm is not relevant to me.
 - The fact that I don't observe people from my own department recognizing each other for helping suggests that helping is not common in my own department.
 - As a result, I will be even more hesitant to ask for help.



Our Predictions

- **Prediction 1:** A peer recognition system broadly adopted by all subgroups of an organization will increase employees' propensity to seek help.
- **Prediction 2:** A peer recognition system narrowly adopted by some but not all subgroups of an organization will:
 - Increase help seeking for employees belonging to subgroups that use the system,
 - Decrease help seeking for employees not belonging to these subgroups.



Testing our predictions

- We use an experiment
 - Create a hypothetical world for participants to immerse themselves into
 - Participants see slightly different versions of the hypothetical world
 - Test how they react depending on their version
- Causality – our specialty!
 - Different versions of the virtual world are strategically designed to test causality
 - The differences in how people act allows us to conclude that the changes that we made across versions of the hypothetical world are what caused them to act differently



The versions of our hypothetical world

- All ~800 participants take on the role of an employee working for a company. There are two types of employees (e.g. Department A and Department B employees)
- Learn about their company, their role in the company, their current struggles with a client
- Asked – what is the likelihood that you would ask for help with your current struggles?

- **What is different between the versions of the hypothetical world?**

- **Version 1 No Peer-Recognition System** – Firm does not use a Peer-Recognition system
- **Version 2 Broadly Adopted System** – Firm uses a Peer-Recognition system, and both types of employees use the system
- **Version 3 Narrowly Adopted System** – Firm uses a Peer-Recognition system, but only one type of employee uses the system



Broad Adoption



McKenzi Harmon, Senior Consultant, recognized **Shirley Chen** for **Going above and beyond**

37 min ago

Senior Consultant

I'd like to recognize Shirley for her boundless enthusiasm for our company and our mission. Building new markets isn't for the faint of heart, but Shirley does it, and she does it well!

Comment (1) Like (14)



Rachelle Huang, Junior Consultant, recognized **Richard Stine** for **Excellent customer support**

2 hrs ago

Junior Consultant

Great job Richard! Our client JMS Manufacturing let me know that you were able to help them analyze their results from their earlier marketing blitz.

Comment (0) Like (11)



Michael Montano, Senior Consultant, recognized **Paul Stamati** for **Helping with project**

3 hrs ago

Senior Consultant

Thank you Paul for all your help with the ABC Project! Your help pushed the project to the next level!

Comment (2) Like (17)

Narrow Adoption



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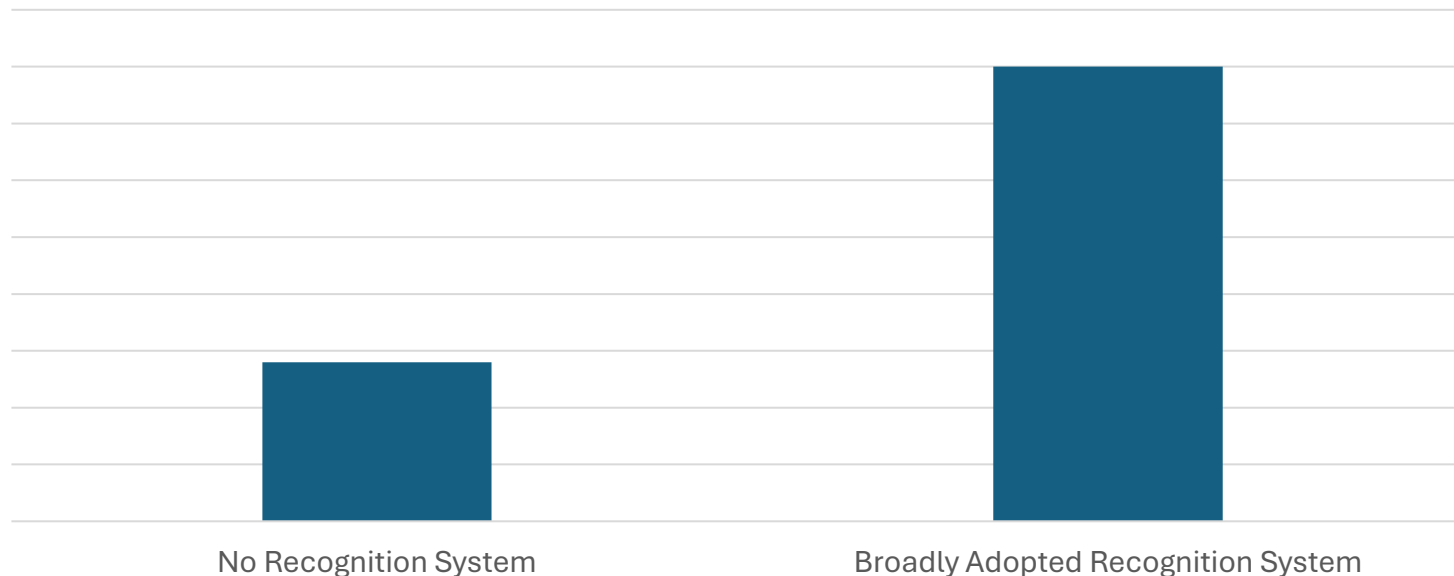
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[Comment \(2\)](#) [Like \(17\)](#)

Results – Our theory is supported!

- Finding 1 - No System Versus Broadly Adopted System
- Significantly more likely to ask for help when their company uses a Broadly Adopted Peer Recognition System!

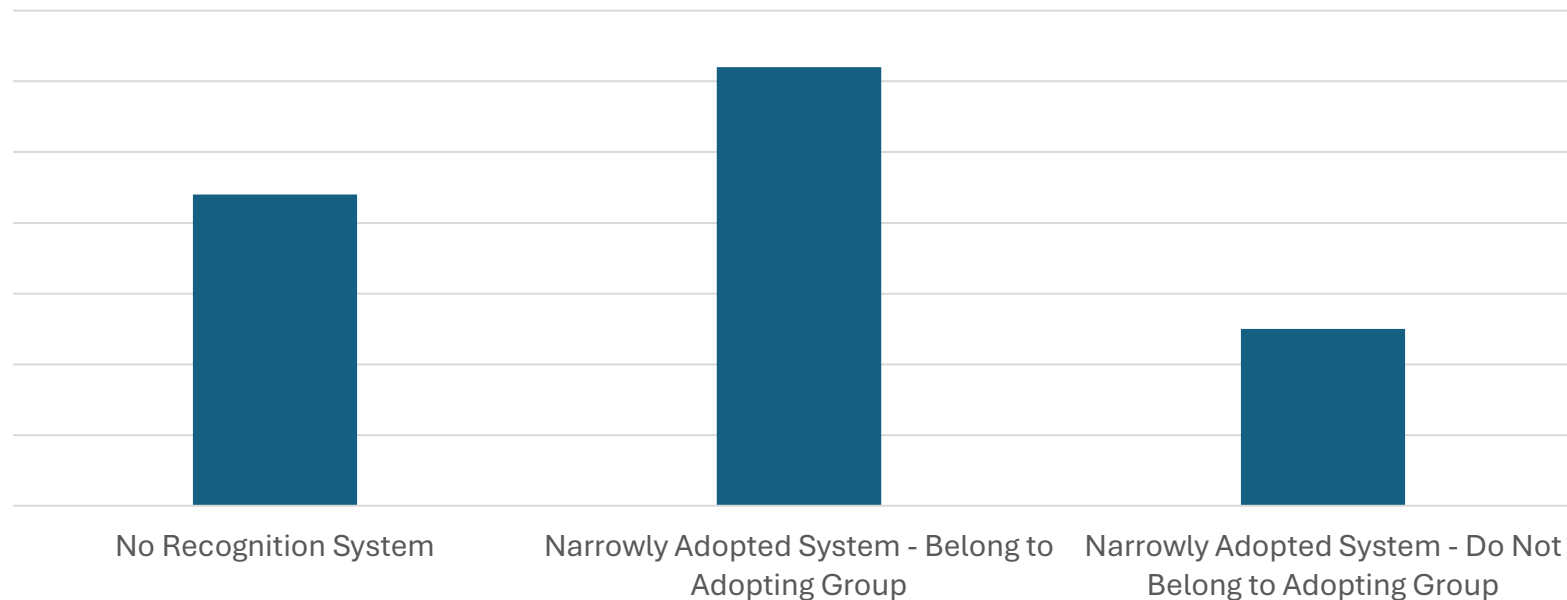
Likelihood of Asking For Help



Results – Our theory is supported!

- Finding 2 - No System Versus Narrowly Adopted System
- Significantly more likely to ask for help when they are part of the adopting group, **BUT significantly LESS likely** to ask for help when not part of the adopting group.

Likelihood of Asking For Help



Collective Results

- Findings support our hypotheses, including across multiple experiments where we change the employee type (e.g., Senior versus Junior, Division A versus Division B)
- We use various models and verify that the findings are driven by our theory:
 - If employees perceive themselves as **part of the group** that uses the system – creates social norm of help seeking, which reduces psychological costs associated with help seeking
 - If employees perceive themselves as **not part of the group** that uses the system – creates social norm of not help seeking, which increases psychological costs associated with help seeking
- Collectively, peer-recognition systems do impact employees' willingness to ask for help
 - However, the effect (good or bad) depends on whether employees are part of the group that uses the system



Wrap-up

The use of peer-recognition systems can benefit firms – including enhancing employees' willingness to ask for help.

Importantly, our findings provide scientific evidence to support claims that peer-recognition systems can enhance collaboration.

Provides support for how to implement a peer-recognition system: try to emphasize broad adoption, if narrowly adopted, the system may inhibit help-seeking.

Our next goal: extend our research outside of the experimental world – team up with companies developing or using recognition systems to help them address their issues and/or questions!



Questions?



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